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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: LIBERAL MP ORGANIZES HUMAN RIGHTS
CONFERENCE FOCUSING ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN

REFS: A) KUWAIT 613
B) 05 KUWAIT 5190

1. (U) The Human Rights Committee of the National Assembly held March 13 - 14 a conference to mark International Women's Day entitled "Women and Challenging Reality." The conference sought to broaden the growth of a culture of respect for human rights, to highlight human rights problems and solutions in Kuwait, to share experiences with neighboring countries, and to emphasize the positive role of women in society. The opening ceremony featured National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi, who stressed that Human Rights principals form the basis for democracy, and MP Ali Al-Rashed, Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, who said violence against women is an international tragedy. He also asserted that one in three Kuwaiti women has been beaten or raped in her lifetime. He was optimistic that women's political rights and their full participation would drastically improve their societal status. Many other high-level Kuwaiti officials attended the conference, including Dr. Anas Al-Rasheed, Minister of Information; Dr. Masouma Al-Mubarak, Minister of Planning; a number of MPs; Shaykha Amthal Al-Sabah, activist and sister of the Amir; Dr. Suad Al-Sabah, sister of the Amir and writer; Dr. Maymouna Al-Sabah, a royal family member involved in women's rights issues; Abdel Aziz Al-Babtain, Human Rights activist; and Dr. Fayza Al-Khorafi, Former Kuwait University President. Several hundred men and women, both conservatives and liberals, attended the two-day gathering. The opening ceremony included a documentary film highlighting Kuwait's efforts in the human rights field as well as the role of different civil society institutions.

2. (U) Each conference session was attended by at least one MP from the five-person Human Rights Committee. Female lecturers from around the Arab world spoke, including Lulwa Al-Awadi from Bahrain, Secretary General for the Women's Higher Council; Mrs. Kawthar

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Al-Bashrawi, a Tunisian television broadcaster; and Dr. Jawhra Al-Angari, head of the Women's Department at the Charity Society for Cancer in Saudi Arabia. Dr. Ibtisam Al-Katbi, Professor in the Political Science Department at UAE University spoke about gender inequality in the family because, she argued, women are seen as only having a role in the kitchen and as housekeepers. Al-Katbi also attacked textbooks that always show the mother going shopping or cooking, while the father is at work, thereby giving children a distorted view of the roles of the sexes. Dr. Al-Katbi asserted the importance of changing the images of women in schoolbooks.

3. (SBU) The second day of the conference was less well attended. It featured lectures on the subject of prisons by Kuwaiti officials Lt. Col Adel Al-Khatlan, Director of Kuwait's Central Prison, and Abdullah Al-Azmi, Director of Juvenile House at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Dr. Nidal Al-Humaidan, a member of a committee commissioned by the National Assembly to report on women's institutions that men cannot visit, talked about her visit to the

Kuwaiti Women's Prison and showed a short documentary video on the women suffering in it. In addition, two lecturers from Iran talked about Iran's experiences with the penal system. Ali Akbar Al-Saqi, Director of Prison and Security Procedures in Iran, claimed that the Iranian prison received an ISO certificate as one of the best prisons in the world. Dr. Burwaiz Afshar, Director General of Health and Treatment in the Iranian Prison System, asserted the importance of treating prisoners while they are in prison. For instance, he noted the importance of a rehabilitation program for drug traffickers before they can be released. (Comment: none of the newspapers mentioned that there would be two Iranian lecturers. LES PolAssistant was told at the conference that the Human Rights Committee had pushed for their attendance. MP Saleh Ashour is the only Shi'a member of the committee and he presided over the session on prison conditions. It is likely he worked behind the scenes to obtain Iranian participation. End comment.)

14. (U) The Conference concluded with the honoring of a number of Human Rights activists, including: Faisal Al-Hajji, former Minister for Social Affairs and Labor; Dr. Ghanim Al-Najjar; Mr. Jassem Al-Qattami, chairman of the Kuwait Human Rights Society; and Dr. Abdel Rahman Al-Sumait, Chairman of the Direct Aid Committee for African Muslims.

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